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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 000100

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FOR A/S FRAZER AND DAS YAMAMOTO FROM VICKI HUDDLESTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/11/2015  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#)  
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: MELES ON INTERNAL SITUATION

Classified By: Charg d'Affaires Vicki Huddleston for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary: In a discussion with Prime Minister Meles on January 9, principally on ways to deal with border demarcation and Dr. Frazer's visit, Meles made the following points regarding the internal situation:

-- The bulk of the youth charged with violent acts will be released rather than stand trial. Currently there are 2,200 in custody: 800 were freed over the holidays.

-- The U.S. and international community is more concerned with the outcome of the trial of the CUD and civil society leaders than with the process, but despite international criticism, the process must go forward because Hailu Shawel and others cannot be seen to be above the law.

-- More time will be provided for the opposition to take over City Hall; the number of opposition MPs in Parliament is now over 150.

-- Differences with the OLF are not irreconcilable and Meles remains open to re-enter a discussion; the PM thought that he had reached an agreement in Bonn, but talks were subsequently broken off by the OLF.

12. (C) Toward the end of our conversation on border issues, I pointed out our concerns that the trial of CUD leaders and others is increasingly divisive, and about continuing unrest in Oromiya. Prime Minister Meles replied that the recent U.S. statement reflected our - an international concern - with the trial's outcome, not due process. The international community wanted a certain outcome (freedom for the detainees), while Ethiopia wanted a process to convince the hard core imprisoned CUD leaders that they are not above the rule of law. While the trial might be divisive internationally, the PM maintained that it was beneficial locally. Meles explained that the lawyers had been turned away once, but they could now meet with their clients. Some had done so. The CUD leaders' strategy, however, was now to reject the process, including the use of lawyers. I suggested separating those with lesser charges from the CUD leadership charged with additional crimes so that the former could choose to use lawyers and participate in the process. Meles complained that CUD leader Berhanu had been disrespectful in claiming the court had no jurisdiction and in attempting to read a political commentary. The "spineless" judge should never have allowed this.

13. (C) Meles said that over the holidays, 800 of the youths detained after the unrest had been released. Furthermore, the bulk of the remaining 2,200 would be released soon. But for those not released, they would be subject to the entire

legal process.

¶4. (C) I told Meles we were hopeful that the opposition would take reins of City government now that UEDP-Medhin leader Lidetu and his rival, ex-UEDP president Admassu, were separately organizing elected city council members to take over Addis Ababa. The PM said "we are dying for them to take over, but we can't make them to do it." He said that given the press of events, AU Summit, and important visits (Dr. Frazer), he could legitimately extend the deadline for the opposition to organize a majority of elected council members so that the opposition could manage the city. (Comment: Kemal Bedri, the head of the National Electoral Board, said that the two rival UEDF-Medhin groups would have to register and determine which one had the mandate to organize the Addis executive branch. End Comment.)

¶5. (C) In regard to the dialogue with the Parliamentary opposition, Meles confirmed that the next meeting would be Thursday. I said that OFDM and UEDF were extremely concerned about ongoing violence in Oromiya. Meles said that Dr. Bulcha's OFDM, like Sinn Fein, is the political front of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). He had talked to Bulcha about this directly. Dr. Merera's Oromo National Congress (ONC) was more complex, but both parties were closely associated with the illegal OLF.

6, (C) Meles lamented that he thought he had struck a deal with OLF leader Lencho in Bonn in which the OLF would respect the constitution, give up violence and become a peaceful political competitor of the EPRDF. However, when violence erupted and the EPRDF looked weak, the OLF had gone back on the agreement and called for insurrection. Nevertheless, differences between the government and OLF were not

ADDIS ABAB 00000100 002 OF 002

irreconcilable. Meles confirmed that he remained open to renewing the discussion. All Lencho had to do was contact him -- and "he knows how to do that."  
HUDDLESTON